

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

September 2022

### INTRODUCING THE ACTIVE ALLY PROFILE

*As a continuing part of our popular Active Ally Online Discussion series, we are pleased to offer a companion series of articles, featuring IADC members and their clients. Our second installment features Melanie Margolin, who has made it her life's work to bring inclusion first. Ms. Margolin's work demonstrates why it is important for us to be allies to our LGBTQ+ colleagues every month of the year and not just during Pride month. We hope this series encourages all of us to continue our lifelong pursuit of learning to advocate for and on behalf of others and celebrate and to continue to amplify and celebrate the differences that make each of us unique and valuable assets to the legal profession.*

## Inclusion Comes First An Active Ally Profile Featuring Melanie Margolin, Chief Legal Officer at Thumbtack, Inc.



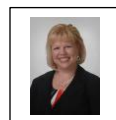
**Melanie Margolin** serves as Thumbtack's Chief Legal Officer. She has over 25 years of broad legal experience leading legal teams and providing strategic guidance to executive teams at large public companies. Before Thumbtack, Melanie served as SVP, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary at Wabash National Corporation and was Deputy General Counsel at Cummins —both publicly traded industrial companies. She has a proven track record of reducing corporate-wide legal, operational, and financial risks/losses and increasing bottom line gains. As a commercially minded business leader, she has been successful in negotiating and executing multi-billion-dollar commercial agreements, M&A transactions, and bet the company litigation settlements. Melanie holds a Juris Doctor degree from DePaul University College of Law, a Bachelors from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and is a graduate of the Executive Finance program at Harvard Business School. She can be reached at [mmargolin@mac.com](mailto:mmargolin@mac.com).

### ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee** is charged with actively increasing the involvement and participation of diverse attorneys in the organization through membership strategies and professional programming that recognizes the strength and benefits of inclusion and diversity in the practice of law. For these purposes, diverse attorneys include lawyers from groups of people who are underrepresented in the IADC's membership. Learn more about the Committee at [www.iadclaw.org](http://www.iadclaw.org). To contribute a newsletter article, contact:



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*The International Association of Defense Counsel serves a distinguished, invitation-only membership of corporate and insurance defense lawyers. The IADC dedicates itself to enhancing the development of skills, professionalism and camaraderie in the practice of law in order to serve and benefit the civil justice system, the legal profession, society and our members.*

IADC Involvement:

**Q: How long have you been a member of IADC?**

A: I joined IADC in 2020 in the middle of the Covid-19 lockdown.

**Q: How are you involved in IADC?**

A: I am primarily involved in the DEI section, and I recently spoke on two panels at the Corporate Counsel College.

**Q: What are the unique challenges, obstacles or barriers faced by you that you have had to overcome in your legal career?**

A: Overall, I have been really fortunate and have had a lot of opportunities for advancement and growth throughout my career. That said, I definitely had obstacles to overcome as a woman working in typically male-dominated industries. For most of my career, I was often the only woman in the room, which came with its challenges. My own clients and colleagues often interrupted me. I was asked if I was the court reporter or paralegal more than a few times. I did not have business development opportunities handed to me the way some of my male colleagues did. As a woman, I had to be more proactive and vocal in order to ensure I was getting the opportunities I knew I deserved. A lot of this changed when I went in-house and worked for an African American female

general counsel who had very little tolerance for these types of biases. She not only made it known when these types of things happened to her, but she also stood up when it happened to her team and worked to bring awareness to many of these biases that often go overlooked. Overall, my obstacles were not insurmountable, and I've been able to accomplish a lot in my career. Now as a leader looking back at my experiences, my focus and objective is to create safe spaces for others.

**Q: How were you able to overcome these obstacles or how did you address them?**

A: Despite the obstacles, I stayed confident in my own merit. I knew I was capable of doing the work and by the time I was a junior partner, I had a hefty book of business that I had built on my own. In addition to growing confidence through my work, I also built out a support system with other female attorneys at my firm and later with the many female attorneys I met in organizations like IADC and DRI.

**Q: What or who helped you overcome these challenges or obstacles related to DEI?**

A: First, let me say, I wish we called it Inclusion, Equity and Diversity. While I know this concept is ever evolving, it is my experience that an environment has to be inclusive and equitable first, and then diverse people, viewpoints and experiences

will belong in that environment. It's been a long time coming that we stop looking only at hiring and retention, and instead examine how we can create a sense of equity and inclusion.

Now, to your question, when I was in private practice, I found that taking on leadership positions and having a client base that gave me a voice helped me feel supported and valued. With that voice and platform, I created opportunities and safe spaces for others to succeed. It was important to me that I mentor and pave the way for other lawyers, helping them connect the dots and find their own success. When you open yourself up and provide opportunities to others, you always end up getting as much from it as the person you are helping.

**Q: Describe your current role(s) at your firm or company with respect to working with and being a supporter of women and diverse attorneys (or employees)?**

A: I am the Chief Legal Officer at Thumbtack, and it is the best job I have ever had. While Thumbtack has a number of corporate programs around DEI and employee resource groups, leaders at our company own our DEI related initiatives function by function. Having senior leadership be accountable for setting commitments and driving forward the actual work in their area is the heart and soul of DEI at Thumbtack and it resonates throughout the company's culture.

Our senior leadership team is also involved in our employee resource groups. Every member of the C-suite sponsors and actively participates in one of the ERGs. I am the LGBTQ+ resource group sponsor, I actively participate in the Women's ERG and I work one on one with members of the Nobletacks ERG which is comprised mostly of our Black employees. While technology companies tend to have fewer Black employees than other industries, it is important at Thumbtack for our Black employees to know they have a voice, and they have my ear—in addition to their executive sponsor who is heavily involved.

Specifically in my Legal function, we have developed a recruiting methodology that has increased the number of diverse legal professionals on our team. When accepting applications for a posted position, we do not speak to or interview a single candidate until at least 50% of the applicant pool is diverse. We are deliberate and intentional about diversity, equity and inclusion from the application stage to the offer and compensation stages. We drill down into the candidate list to make sure we are hitting these numbers and if we need to personally source candidates, we do so. My entire team has taken that approach because we understand we are missing out if we do not get other perspectives in the room and open doors for folks who may not have had the opportunity to show what they can do in our space.

**Q: What role do you think IADC, and its leaders can play in creating programs or efforts to help advance women or diverse attorneys (or employees) in their careers?**

A: With the caliber of people and the level of talent in IADC, we have an opportunity and an obligation to be a leader in DEI. The best things we can do to show leadership in this area are twofold:

First, we have to continue to live out our values with the programming and panels where our members are hearing from people who they know, trust and admire. There is no longer an excuse to have an all-white or all male panel or even an event where the majority of speakers and experts are not diverse. At the Corporate College this spring, I was delighted to see diversity throughout all of the panels, and we must be committed to that moving forward.

Second, where the IADC may not have the internal resources to provide the most up to date information or data or opportunities on DEI related issues, we should bring in outside resources to help get things done. When you have an expert in the DEI field come into a leadership team meeting or present on a panel, everyone is the beneficiary of that, and it spreads back to the firms and corporate legal functions. I think IADC has made a concerted effort in the past couple of years to increase its focus in this area. I

would suggest, though, that it should not always be up to the diverse members of IADC to carry this water—all members should be thinking about it and leaning in to help whether they are still at the “business case” level for DEI or serving as a strong ally.

**Q: Why take time from your own legal career to be a mentor, partner, ally, sponsor and champion for other attorneys (employees?)**

A: In addition to mentoring and being an active ally, I must say representation matters. It matters seeing people who are similar to you in some way and having those people not just at the firm or company, but in leadership. Having Black leaders matters. Having women leaders matters. It is true across the board. When you have representation at the leadership level, it makes a big difference and I do not think as a culture or a profession we talk about it enough.

I think it is a mistake to maintain systems or companies or teams that work in silos. Those systems are flawed and are lacking so much. As an alternative, we should create legal teams where everyone has an attitude of putting the client first and everyone is focused on solving the problem in the most effective, and creative way possible. If everyone is in a silo or everyone on the team is the same, this does not happen. I developed that attitude when I was still in private practice. I built out a



diverse and inclusive team that was team and clients first. It was an incredible team to be a part of and most of us are still quite close after all these years. Seeing those younger lawyers succeed has been the biggest privilege and accomplishment of my career.

## Past Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee Newsletters

Visit the Committee's newsletter archive online at [www.iadclaw.org](http://www.iadclaw.org) to read other articles published by the Committee. Prior articles include:

MARCH 2022

["The Right Thing to Do" An Active Ally Profile Featuring John Browning](#)

DECEMBER 2017

[Thought Leadership: Championing Diversity and Inclusion; A Conversation with Connie Lewis Lensing, Senior VP of Litigation Department at Federal Express](#)

Pamela W. Carter

NOVEMBER 2017

[Making the Case: How Diversity and Inclusion Can Improve Your Firm's Financial Outlook](#)

Paul M. Fires and Kenneth E. Sharperson

JUNE 2017

[Clarity on the Horizon? Another Appeals Court Grants En Banc Review of Sexual Orientation Discrimination under Title VII](#)

Eve B. Masinter and Rachael M. Coe

SEPTEMBER 2016

[Hively v. Ivy Tech Comty. Coll., S. Bend, 15-1720, 2016 WL 4039703 \(7th Cir. July 28, 2016\): Sexual Orientation Discrimination not \(yet\) Covered by Title VII](#)

Eve B. Masinter and Rachael M. Coe

JANUARY 2015

[Update on Transgender Rights in the Workplace](#)

Eve B. Masinter, Rachael A. Jeanfreu and Rachael Coe